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## Imperial Modernism

Mark Crinson

Modernism's arrival in the colonies was, as elsewhere, often understood as the coming into being of something distinct within a sea of otherness. Like the ship sailing the oceans in Joseph Conrad's novels, the Modernist object was sealed off from any other reality except the most primordial.<sup>1</sup> This way of framing heightened the absolute newness, the alienness of Modernism, as against the indeterminacy of its surroundings. Modernism thus became another arrival, another filling of *terra nullius* (or *vacuo mari*) in the history of empire. It created situations of '[being] exposed to the two separate and hostile realities of human life: what nature is and what men want and do.'<sup>2</sup> A new order was brought to this eventless emptiness, but so too a sameness and increasing familiarity as the globe was encircled. This might reflect back, and endorse, the west's old mission—civilizing, rationalizing, developmental—'the good opinion it has of itself', to use Frederic Jameson's words,<sup>3</sup> but it did this in a different way from previous colonial architecture.

That difference is seen in attitudes to history and representation. There is a rousing yet wonderfully allusive statement of Victorian attitudes to architecture in the empire in John Ruskin's inaugural lecture, delivered at Oxford University in 1870:

[England] must found colonies as fast and far as she is able ... seizing every piece of fruitful waste ground she can set her foot on, and there teaching these her colonists that their chief virtue is to be fidelity to their country, and that their first aim is to be to advance the power of England by land and sea ... these colonies must be fastened fleets; and every man of them must be under authority of captains and officers, whose better command is to be over fields and streets instead of ships of the line; and England, in these her motionless navies (or, in

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<sup>1</sup> F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act* (London, 1981), pp. 269–70. For typical examples of this approach see U. Kultermann, *New Directions in African Architecture* (London, 1969); or the essays in J. M. Richards (ed.), *New Buildings in the Commonwealth* (London, 1961). In the latter book Robin Boyd even used the metaphor of the sea to characterize modern Australian culture: 'Australian culture is something like a sturdy little boat battling across lonely waters surging with cross-currents from Europe and America' (p. 17).

<sup>2</sup> V. Scully, *Modern Architecture: The Architecture of Democracy* (New York, 1961), p. 11. Scully is describing Le Corbusier's High Court at Chandigarh.

<sup>3</sup> Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 270.

the true and mightiest sense, motionless *churches*, ruled by pilots on the Galilean lake of all the world), is to ‘expect every man to do his duty’.<sup>4</sup>

The sea plays a dual role here, both as analogy and actual force of nature. It is oddly stilled, with colonies as ‘fastened fleets’ ruled by the pacifying force of churches that are at the same time navies. Architecture’s role, it follows, is to do away with alienness, to teach values, especially those associated with national identity, and to enable brute power to be carried forward through the shaping of environment (from ‘fruitful waste ground’ to ‘fields and streets’).

An inevitable step, if not a familiar Ruskinian one, is to move from these words to the architecture of Herbert Baker (1862–1946) and the colonial ideology of his patron Cecil Rhodes, one of Ruskin’s most enthusiastic undergraduate listeners.<sup>5</sup> In 1892 Baker sought his architectural fortune in South Africa, staying for two decades. Throughout his work there—whether in the house he designed for himself with its ‘deep Roman Stoep’ and plain Dutch gables,<sup>6</sup> the piled-up Union Buildings in Pretoria ‘opening its mouth’ from its rocky hillside, or the prospect-pointing classical memorials to the dead of colonial wars—the ideas of memory, dream and immortality are incarnated. The architecture was assertively symbolic.<sup>7</sup> In Rhodes’ terms, it incubated ‘the best of the country and its people’.<sup>8</sup> The mining industries of South Africa and other workings of colonial exploitation were transmuted into a more reassuring tale of old world histories, ‘[embodying] dreams in enduring monuments’.<sup>9</sup> (FIG 1)

As discussed by Robert Irving in this volume, Edwin Lutyens (1869–1944), Baker’s collaborator on many projects, was a different kind of imperial architect, working empire’s possibilities mostly from the metropolis, but he shared the same agenda described by Ruskin. His work also played powerfully, if more nimbly, across many of the languages and potentials of architecture. The layout of New Delhi (1911–31) gathered in the past, pivoting on the Hindu and Muslim monuments around it in order

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<sup>4</sup> J. Ruskin, *Lectures on Art* (London, 1894), pp. 37–8.

<sup>5</sup> D. E. Greig, *Herbert Baker in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1970), p. 33. Baker also knew this lecture well: see Herbert Baker, *Architecture and Personalities* (London, 1944), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Greig, *Herbert Baker*, p. 61.

<sup>7</sup> As Rudyard Kipling wrote to Baker of the Kimberley Monument, ‘Do you see the amount of symbolism you’ve let yourself in for?’ Baker, *Architecture and Personalities*, p. 38.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

to subsume them under the priorities of the colonial state. Cultural expressions of the colonised were incorporated into the classical scheme of the coloniser, the 'historicising masks ... of its stone stage sets'.<sup>10</sup> Baker's and Lutyens's architecture, therefore, may be modern but it was never Modernist. It profited from the radical re-making of economies in southern Africa and India. It re-made cities, providing the built apparatus of modern governmental bureaucracies. It reiterated these supercharged powers in hierarchies of rank, caste and race, in monumental pomp and spatial circumstance. History, near and far, was owned by this architecture. And the writing of history paralleled this, as Banister Fletcher's magisterial *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method* (1896) showed. Initially this omitted any non-western architecture, but by 1921 (in its sixth edition) the non-western had been introduced to the lower branches of the 'Tree of Architecture', where it was subordinated within the 'Non-Historical' styles. History, then, was taken forward by the nations of the west. Onto the Ruskinian idea of architecture as an expression of national life was mapped the orientalist and ultimately Hegelian idea of static and dynamic cultures. The same schema underpinned New Delhi's relation to its Indian context.

A sense of mission or a seeking of fortune also drove many of the Modernist architects who worked in the empire, but now the Victorians and Edwardians with their historicist architecture were part, as it were, of the surrounding sea. Modernism announced a departure from any prevailing regime: 'To make oneself modern was,' in Neil Levine's words, 'almost by definition, a process of reduction and negation'.<sup>11</sup> It was as if an architecture of abstraction could reduce and negate the history (of architecture) and representation (of nature) to be found in previous architecture and, accordingly, as if the change between these regimes accompanied changes in other regimes. It was as if abstraction, furthermore, could better express changes in daily life, constituting some kind of 'utopian compensation for everything lost in the process of the development of capitalism'.<sup>12</sup> This is a new experience, the architecture said, unlike any in previous forms of social life.

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<sup>10</sup> S. Giedion, *Building in France: Building in Iron, Building in Ferroconcrete* (1928), as quoted in Neil Levine, *Modern Architecture: Representation and Reality* (New Haven and London, 2009), p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>12</sup> Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 236.

Architectural historians have recently reacted against at least two assumptions behind what might seem a familiar narrative of alienness, consummated by triumph or failure, shipwreck or conquest. The first is that modernity is a peculiarly western experience or condition depending upon highly developed industrial economies. The second is the assumption that Modernism, the artistic reaction to this modernity, was a developmental and disseminative movement, one that worked forward and outwards from a western locus.<sup>13</sup> Terms like ‘other Modernisms’, ‘peripheral Modernism’, ‘alternative Modernisms’, and ‘indigenous modernities’ have signaled ways out of this western-Modernism linkage while tending to absorb modernism into wider terms like modernity or modernisation.<sup>14</sup> The Modernism that remains is still seen, as in a rear-view mirror, as a monolithic western construct. Yet experiences of dislocation as a result of modernisation created multiple and different modernities according to one’s location in the world. These were inherently experiences of otherness and alienation, of fragmentation and new possibility; they were judderingly transformative whether they were found in the rookeries and the *banlieues* of the metropole or the *chawls* and *maidans* of the colony. Modernism was the culture that attempted to respond to these experiences.

Another recent term formulated as an alternative to the western-Modernism linkage is that of ‘Third World Modernism’. Again this is premised upon Modernism having a different if equally interesting character in developing countries, one seen as linked with other, non-western entities, and not subsumed within hegemonic Euro-American discourses.<sup>15</sup> But western Modernism was not a distinct historical phenomenon from ‘third world modernism’; the idea depends upon the myth of modernism as a phenomenon forged in the west and then imposed on the rest of the world. To criticise this is not to claim that Modernism was free of colonialism, a road to independence and modernity, as another myth maintained. While ‘western’ and ‘third world’ forms cannot be separated off from each other, neither do they need to be resolved into a hegemonic relation.

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<sup>13</sup> ‘Modern architecture is a product of western civilisation’, is the opening sentence of one such history: Scully, *Modern Architecture*, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> See G. Wright, ‘Building Global Modernism’, *Grey Room*, vol. 7 (2002), pp. 130 and 134, n. 24; S. Chattopadhyay, *Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism, and the Colonial Uncanny* (London, 2006), pp. 4–5; J. Hosagrahar, *Indigenous Modernities: Negotiating Architecture and Urbanism* (London, 2005), pp. 4–5.

<sup>15</sup> D. Lu, ‘Introduction’, in D. Lu (ed.), *Third World Modernism: Architecture, Development and Identity* (Abingdon, 2011), p. 3.

These formulations are also some distance from how Modernism was understood by contemporaries practicing and promoting it. The Sri Lankan architect Minnette de Silva (1918–98) is a case in point. (FIG. 2) Trained in Bombay and then at the Architectural Association (London) in the immediate postwar years, and coming from an actively anti-colonial if not anti-western family, de Silva rejected both previous colonial architecture and what she called the ‘veneer of modernism’ that had already entered colonial Ceylon (as today’s Sri Lanka was known until 1972).<sup>16</sup> She was a co-founder of the Modern Architecture Research Group (MARG) and India’s representative at the *Congrès International d’Architecture Moderne* (CIAM). A friend of Le Corbusier, and in regular contact with Siegfried Giedion, she enjoyed a Modernist network of social and artistic affiliations. Her response to colonial Ceylon’s climate was developed before Modernist responses to tropical climates had become formulaic, and she understood this and her use of local crafts as complementary with the internationalist Modernist language she deployed.<sup>17</sup> If her Modernism was posited against anything it was a historicist colonial culture promoting imitations of European and indigenous styles while neglecting the local crafts that had created them.<sup>18</sup>

For de Silva and others like her, Modernism provided a way out of the hold of identity- and memory-based notions of architecture and towards ideals of universalism, social improvement, and benevolent technological development; a taming of the wild sea or a course set to calmer waters. The prospect Modernism offered could be enticing or threatening wherever one was geographically located. For many it suggested the smoothing over of borders, whether those between nations or those between empire and world, but without losing cultural distinctiveness. It is this historical understanding of Modernism that prevails in this chapter, though it will scrutinise Modernism’s own exclusionary logic and entanglements with empire. Modernism had its own circuits or networks, often interpolated within existing institutions of architectural professionalism crisscrossing different parts of the world. Operating within and beyond political spheres

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<sup>16</sup> Much of my information on de Silva is from Minnette de Silva, *The Life and Work of an Asian Woman Architect* (Kandy, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> Recent attention has attempted to align de Silva’s work either with later theories of critical regionalism or as part of the essentialised view of climate as embodied in the practice of ‘Tropical Architecture’. See A. Tzonis and L. Lefaivre, ‘The Suppression and Rethinking of Regionalism and Tropicalism After 1945’, in A. Tzonis and B. Stagno (eds.), *Tropical Architecture: Critical Regionalism in the Age of Globalization* (London, 2001), p. 32; A. Pieris, ‘“Tropical” cosmopolitanism? The untoward legacy of the American style in post-independence Ceylon/Sri Lanka’, *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, vol. 32 (2011), pp. 332–49.

<sup>18</sup> Minnette De Silva to Siegfried Giedion, 3 January 1950, GTA Archives (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, Zurich), 42-SG-34-13/15.

of influence like empire, Modernists might use the imperial apparatus while also deploying other vehicles of information and influence. From another perspective, the fact that its tools were used by various imperial ideologies does not mean that there was a necessary identification between Modernism and those ideologies (why otherwise would Modernism also be understood as liberatory?). In sum, while there was a hegemonic relation between Euro-America and the rest of the world, and a more specific relation between metropolis and colony within the British empire, Modernism cannot simply be mapped onto differences of power.

The architectural forms, theories, pedagogies, and rhetoric that were called *Neues Bauen*, 'the Modern movement' and eventually 'Modernism',<sup>19</sup> all crystallised in 1920s Europe, spreading from there to other parts of the world. There is little denying this dissemination nor the means that it used: whether it was magazines, exhibitions, ex-Bauhauslers, young architects straight out of architectural schools and sent to the colonies, or colonial students returning to their home countries. But as neither a neutral phenomenon nor necessarily a means of domination, this spreading of Modernism needs further consideration.<sup>20</sup>

Dissemination is, after all, a near-ontological condition of an architectural culture that exists to propagate images, practices and ideas. As such, dissemination happened without necessarily being part of some larger 'domination of the West', if anything rather the reverse. There are several immediate ways of demonstrating this. One is that the colonies were often treated as a 'laboratory of modernity' in which new kinds of cultural expression, new government policies, new forms of architecture and planning were tried out *before* they were used in Europe.<sup>21</sup> Colonialism, in other words, played a key role in creating Modernism. Similarly, in its very origins Modernism was already involved in the colonial relationship, in the constituting of what has usefully been called the 'colonial modern'.<sup>22</sup> A second demonstration is that British Modernism was a belated matter, and largely itself the product of dissemination in the form of European Modernist émigrés

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<sup>19</sup> See Mary McLeod, 'Modernism', in I. Borden, M. Fraser, and B. Penner (eds.), *Forty Ways to Think About Architecture: Architectural History and Theory Today* (Chichester, 2014), pp. 185–92.

<sup>20</sup> 'Dissemination' is still used, both critically and uncritically, in much the same way as its use in Hitchcock's classic account of 1958. H-R. Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Harmondsworth, 1977) (first published 1958), p. 556.

<sup>21</sup> This was more the case in the French colonies than in the British Empire: see P. Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge Mass., 1989).

<sup>22</sup> T. Avermaete, S. Karakayali and M. von Osten (eds.), *Colonial Modern: Aesthetics of the Past – Rebellions of the Future* (London, 2010).

and refugees arriving in the 1930s to lend their authority and urgency to what before then was a scattered, often dilettante-ish affair. The same effect was felt in other parts of the world, including the British Empire, when elements of this Modernist diaspora were scattered further afield. As an embattled minority taste hounded out of central Europe and identified with political and social marginality, Modernism arrived less in triumph than in retreat: this was the case with Erich Mendelsohn in Palestine, Bruno Taut in Turkey, Otto Koenigsberger in India, Ernst May in East Africa, and Julius Posener in Palestine and Malaysia. Thus, its early associations were often not with colonial policy, in fact the universalist solutions of Modernism were initially advocated in preference to colonial culture. In Palestine the new architecture became linked with the insurgent power of the Zionist movement, in British Malaya it was seen as nationalist, in India as a mark of international modernity, while in East and West Africa it could be a sign of benevolent technical expertise. A third and final form of demonstration is that, instead of a supine or passive reception of Modernism, many clients and architects were in fact active agents, appropriating Modernism to their purposes rather than being appropriated by it. Modernism could be commissioned by private clients or indigenous rulers, categorized as a technical solution to housing problems or the latest form of chic styling; in all cases it might have little or no connection with existing colonial ideology. And there is, it follows, no need to understand this Modernism as merely the distorted, misunderstood or in other ways sullied offshoots of a pure root.<sup>23</sup>

In what follows there is no attempt to survey the subject of Modernism in the empire, to supply a canon of significant buildings, or to separate the empire from Britain. Instead the chapter's themes explore the relationship between Modernism and empire. Rather than treat Modernism and empire as pre-existing entities that are layered or interleaved, their relationship is understood in ways that open up or re-cast each other. It is in this spirit that the workings of the avantgarde, of official Modernism, of a climatically functional architecture for the tropics, of the vernacular, and of Modernism's continuation after empire, are all treated.

### **Avantgarde**

The Modernist self-image, whatever its establishment ambitions, was bound up with those attempts at alterity associated with the idea of the avantgarde. Small groups, vivid if

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<sup>23</sup> This view is exemplified in Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (New York, 1988), p. 232.



low-circulation magazines, calculated acts of experiment or rebellion, all characterised the avantgarde, and all were imitated and reiterated in new bursts of Modernist propagation or dissidence. The question is how such avantgardism worked across a different politico-cultural terrain, that of empire, and whether the concept has any analytical value in this context.

Two related instances were the MARS Group (Modern Architecture Research Group) and MARG (also the Modern Architecture Research Group).<sup>24</sup> The first was founded in London in 1933 to give focus to the tiny numbers of modernist architects and critics in England, while the second was announced in Bombay in 1945 as one product of a circle of Bombay-based architects, artists and writers. Each group controlled membership by strict criteria of conformity with Modernist criteria (one could not design in a form of art deco, for instance), and each functioned in part as chapters of CIAM. Both saw themselves as bringing advanced architectural and urban thinking into their respective host countries and establishing a CIAM version of Modernism (that is, one following the approach advanced by the alliance of Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, and Siegfried Giedion) in their respective countries through various kinds of campaigning including journalism and exhibitions. Both were thus marginal to the geographic centre of Modernism. What Modernist architecture could already be found in India, as in England in 1933, might be characterized as unsystematic, lacking a supportive culture, and without significant international dimensions.<sup>25</sup> So the founding of MARG was understood as the first substantial establishment of a culture of Modernist architecture in India. Far from a proxy of MARS, MARG related directly to European Modernism and in some respects was in advance of the British group.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> On the MARS Group, see J. Gold, “‘A Very Serious Responsibility’? The MARS Group, Internationality and Relations with CIAM, 1933-39”, *Architectural History*, vol. 56 (2013), pp. 249–75; and L. Campbell, “The MARS Group, 1933-1939”, *RIBA Transactions*, vol. 4:2 (1985), pp. 68–79.

<sup>25</sup> For the Indian situation see, for example, J. Lang, *A Concise History of Modern Architecture in India* (Delhi, 2002); P. vir Gupta, C. Mueller and C. Samii, *Golconde: The Introduction of Modernism in India* (Delhi, 2010); J. Lang, M. Desai, and M. Desai, *Architecture and Independence: The Search for Identity — India 1880 to 1980* (Delhi, 1997); and P. Scriver and V. Prakash (eds.), *Colonial Modernities: Building, Dwelling and Architecture in British India and Ceylon* (London, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> For example, *Marg* published the first English translation of the Charter of Athens: Rachel Lee and Kathleen James-Chakraborty, ‘*Marg* Magazine: A Tryst with Architectural Modernity: Modern architecture as seen from an independent India’, *ABE Journal*, vol. 1 (2012) para. 9. MARG had one member — Percy Johnson-Marshall — who was also a member of the MARS Group, but all other members had come to modernism from a variety of routes.

If, from MARG's perspective, India had barely any Modernism to speak of in 1945 that was not because Modernism was not required there. Although MARG and its magazine *Marg* (founded in 1946) aimed to relate Indian arts to more global currents, they were primarily concerned with the specific conditions of India, most of all with how to elevate architectural production into a significant relation with the political forces—whether industrialist, anti-colonial, or Communist—that were attempting to transform the Indian economy in the last years of empire. Unlike the MARS Group, here MARG had significant political affiliations from the beginning including the sympathetic ear of the nationalist leader Jawaharlal Nehru and the wealth of the industrialist J. R. D. Tata, who funded the magazine. While MARS had no such outlet, *Marg* was treated in its early years by its editor, the novelist Mulk Raj Anand, like a mixture of avantgarde broadsheet and *de luxe* art magazine. It reached out to a range of international contributors, published manifestoes, discussed problems of planning and housing, presented exemplary contemporary architecture, published articles on modern and ancient Indian art, and was led from the front by Anand's peppy editorials.<sup>27</sup> Also, unlike MARS, MARG's declared antinomies included colonialism and its 'slavish mentality', from which the internationalist aspirations of Modernism would allow a release.<sup>28</sup> Neither group had the dismissive attitude to the past typical of the previous generation of avantgardes: while MARS co-opted Vitruvius to its agenda, MARG used its magazine *Marg* to find affiliations with a variety of Indian arts of the pre-colonial past. And both groups promoted Modernism on the largest scale: while MARS designed its own plan for London, MARG helped prepare the way for Chandigarh which *Marg* then publicized through enthusiastic special issues.<sup>29</sup> But it was only MARG that had to deal with the conundrum of the dismissal of national styles—of 'history and representation'—at the same time as the nation was emerging from colonialism.

Introducing the idea of the avantgarde into a discussion of architectural Modernism and empire is surprisingly rare, in fact as rare as introducing the idea of colonialism into the discussion of the relation between the avantgarde and mainstream modernism. So it makes sense to turn to that second conjunction. What happens to our understanding of

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<sup>27</sup> We need to know more about other journals of this kind across the colonial world. The British Malayan magazine *PETA*, for instance, is well worth similar analysis.

<sup>28</sup> 'Planning and Dreaming', *Marg*, vol. 1:1 (1946), p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> 'Chandigarh: A New Planned City', *Marg*, vol. 15:1 (1961).

the relation between the avantgarde and the welfare state when empire is taken into account?

The early career of James Stirling (1924–92) reveals the everyday co-existence of empire and architectural culture in the metropolis. If this period in Stirling’s career is usually discussed in terms of his connections with the avantgarde—the Independent Group, Team X—then another part of this picture was the intermingling of empire in daily life as well as the links between architecture and empire. This circuitry of connections was fundamental to the cultures Stirling passed through: from his father, ship’s engineer for the world-transiting Blue Funnel Line, to his childhood spent in the port city of Liverpool, to his training at that most important centre for producing imperial architects, the Liverpool School of Architecture, where many aspiring architects who came from the empire or later went to work in it studied (see Jackson and Uduku chapter in this volume, pp. xx-xx). After Liverpool, Stirling enrolled in the School for Planning and Research for Regional Development in London. The School’s staff included Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, Colin Buchanan, and Percy Johnson-Marshall—all with strong colonial connections—and it was famed for its specialist expertise in training architect-planners for the colonies.<sup>30</sup>

Stirling’s next move was to join James Cubitt and Partners, then developing a local reputation through its West End shops and a wider one through school and government buildings in the British colonies. When Stirling started there in late 1952 (he stayed for six months) the firm had major commissions for a huge pharmaceutical plant in Rangoon (Burma) and the Technical College at Kumasi (present-day Ghana), and was about to become one of the capital city’s best-connected middling-Modern practices, well-positioned to take advantage of the transition from empire to independence.<sup>31</sup> Rumours have associated Stirling with the firm’s South Africa Travel Centre, probably because of its glamorous and elegant design, with constructionist wall decoration and Aalto-esque undulating ceiling (FIG. 3). South Africa’s state inauguration of apartheid policies dates from 1948 and in 1950 the Group Area Acts, designed to separate racial groups geographically, had been passed. This is the context in which the apparently

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<sup>30</sup> The School’s aim was to train its students ‘to appreciate the wider issues of the economic and political situation’: Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, ‘School of Planning. An Account of its History, Aims and Objectives and Proposals for Future Development’, Royal Institute of British Architecture Archives, TyJ/6/2.

<sup>31</sup> For its mid-1950s production, see ‘Recent Buildings in the Gold Coast’, *Architectural Review*, vol. 119 (May 1956), pp. 230-41.

apolitical public relations of a design like that for the South Africa Travel Centre, much praised by the Modernist establishment,<sup>32</sup> was staged. But the design was finished by early 1951, before Stirling started with Cubitt. What is known for sure is that Stirling helped develop the firm's designs for West African schools. Such projects were part of a 'new spirit... in colonial building' that Britain launched after the war, providing bread-and-butter work for several such London-based practices.<sup>33</sup>

Stirling's failure to become a state architect and his flirtation with Cubitt's late imperial practice, were important formative experiences, but there are more direct relations between the London-based avantgarde and empire. Alison (1928–93) and Peter (1923–2003) Smithson were perhaps the most determined avantgardists of this generation and their involvement with colonial architecture was a little more direct than Stirling's. There is, for example, a competition design made in 1952–3 for a head office building for the Uganda Electricity Board in Kampala (FIG. 4). The design is ordered around two devices: a 16 foot square grid of supports separate from screen walls, and the idea of 'casing' the building within air cushions or 'breezeways', one above within the umbrella roof and the other on two sides of the building within the shadowed depth created between the true façade and the exterior by four-foot deep *brise-soleil*.<sup>34</sup> The principle behind this casing is piquantly captured by an anthropomorphic analogy written on one drawing: 'building appears like a nun's face in a coif ... face within a face'.<sup>35</sup> The

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<sup>32</sup> It was listed among favoured buildings by the Sub-Committee on the Index of Modern Architecture of the Architectural Association in 1957: Percy Johnson-Marshall Collection, Edinburgh University Library, Crate 127 SR11.

<sup>33</sup> The throwaway comments of the editor of *Architectural Design* are revealing: 'I can understand the fascination of Chandigarh at this stage, as it all begins to mean something and all that lovely work right on the boards. Not very much of that commodity here just lately. Tripe and Wakeham who had so much Kuwait stuff have now started folding, though Farmer & Darke, who collared a lot of engineering and civic stuff still seem to be alright. Otherwise apart from Freddie G., whose airport is enough to keep him for years, only Edward Mills seems to prosper. Oh yes Cubitt and Manasseh seem to have broken into Burma or Malaya or somewhere': Theo Crosby to Jane Drew, 20 January 1954, Royal Institute of British Architects Drawings Collection, F&D/6/4. From one point of view Crosby's statement is merely an expression of local anxiety, a parochial concern with a charmed circle of middling metropolitan firms that, as the statement gathers momentum, contradicts its own starting premise. But it also shows how it was quite possible to design colonial architecture while still located in London, often with offices overseas but sometimes still in a way not fundamentally dissimilar to those Victorian architects who sent out designs and never set foot in the colonies. The opportunities to design in the colonies at this time are evidenced also by the number of British students who signed up for the Department of Tropical Architecture's course when it started in 1955.

<sup>34</sup> O. Koenigsberger, 'Tropical Architecture 2', *Architectural Design*, vol. 24 (January 1954), p. 19. It is notable how in the Smithsons' own account of the design no mention is made of those theories of Tropical Architecture that undoubtedly influenced the design. Instead, it is presented as part of their own internally developing 'language' of architecture. See Alison and Peter Smithson, *The Charged Void: Architecture* (New York, 2001), p. 98.

<sup>35</sup> Reproduced in *Ibid* (Smithson), p. 98.

Smithsons also designed Iraqi House in Piccadilly (1960–1), a tourist office created within an Edwardian building. With its sunken display case for passing pedestrians to gaze down at, its undulating sand-finished walls and panels of mosaic and bas-relief, it seems to do little but reinforce clichés about the Middle East. Perhaps it is inconceivable that a tourist office could do anything else, that it could be designed either against its remit or to establish a dissident architectural position, as might be expected of the avantgarde.

The Smithsons' attempt to ride on the coattails of late imperialism also had deeper connections with colonial culture. If colonialism was bound up with the development of ideas about primitivism and orientalism, of race's delimiting effects, then Modernism had also invested in these ideas. The most salient postwar versions of this were the discussions and projects of young apostate Modernists in CIAM in the early and mid-1950s. The Smithsons played a key role here, not just with their own work but also through publishing that of colonial architects in North Africa.<sup>36</sup> Through their understanding of slum housing in Morocco and Algeria, seen as conditioned by local cultures shaped by colonial modernity, these North African architects (in reality largely young French architects working in the colonies) were projecting a defiantly avantgarde position which, while part of a history of European experimentation in North Africa, was also specifically directed at CIAM debates (especially the CIAM 9 meeting in Aix-en-Provence). Anthropological concepts of lived space, for example, were being posited against functionalist notions of zoned space.<sup>37</sup> What was particularly challenging about these projects was that they were not based on assumptions made from pre-modern tribal life or the so-called 'lost cities of Africa' but instead on an eclectic range of social scientific and observational studies of contemporary *bidonvilles*, those slums made from flattened oil cans and discarded items of the building industry. It was from these unpromising sources, steeped in the realities of colonial underdevelopment, that architects in North Africa proposed to leaven their own Modernist housing complexes. This contrasted with the lack of interest by more mainstream colonial Modernists in the lessons of anthropology, their concern with an ever-progressing modernity for which

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<sup>36</sup> Alison and Peter Smithson, 'Collective Housing in Morocco. The Work of Atbat-Afrique: Bodiansky, Candilis, Woods', *Architectural Design* (January 1955), pp. 2–8.

<sup>37</sup> Among a growing literature on this subject, see particularly T. Avermaete, 'CIAM, Team X, and the Rediscovery of African Settlements: Between Dogon and Bidonville', in J.-F. Lejeune and M. Sabatino (eds.), *Modern Architecture and the Mediterranean: Vernacular Dialogues and Contested Identities* (London, 2010), pp. 250–64; as well as the essays in Avermaete *et al*, *Colonial Modern*.

universal solutions might be found, and their belief that climate and other geographical factors were all prevailing.<sup>38</sup> But if the North African architects provided a resonant model of how to be avantgarde, even within the institutions of colonial control, it was not one emulated in the British empire.

For the Smithsons this concern with ad hoc solutions to the complex and changing realities of late colonial urbanism matched their own developing ideas about the challenges presented to long-established communities by rampant modernization.<sup>39</sup> In this context, however, the projects the Smithsons developed for the Middle East and Africa, as well as Iraqi House in London, and their frequent references to India in their writings, seem oddly uncritical of colonial mores. While colonialism was hardly mentioned, any critique was instead to do with what might be learnt from pre-modern architecture. Although there was also a critique of climate determinism,<sup>40</sup> this was not augmented with analysis of the cultures of late colonialism.

Faced with evidence like Iraqi House and the Kampala competition design, it is difficult to maintain a view of avantgarde architecture as an exemplary ethical position regarding design, semi-autonomous from the world beyond it, resistant especially to the state's idea of architecture. If the very clarity of the Uganda Electricity Board design can be understood as offering some exemplary lucidity of thinking on other matters, this is undercut by the nun's coif reference and all it casually implies about the history of missionary involvement in Africa. There is little sign in the Smithsons' or Stirling's work of any critical attitude towards empire,<sup>41</sup> though of course there is with MARG. And with MARG there is also a desire to give the avantgarde a formative role in the postcolonial state.

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<sup>38</sup> A salient example is Fry and Drew's disdain for the contemporary work of Meyer Fortes in Ghana. See V. d'Auria, 'In the laboratory and in the field: hybrid housing design for the African city in late-colonial and decolonizing Ghana (1945–57)', *Journal of Architecture*, vol. 19:3 (2014), pp. 337–8. In this view, anthropology was seen to stand for preservation and to oppose change.

<sup>39</sup> A. Smithson, *Team 10 Meetings* (New York, 1991), p. 19.

<sup>40</sup> V. Baweja, 'Otto Koenigsberger and the Tropicalization of British Architectural Culture', in Lu, *Third World Modernism*, p. 244.

<sup>41</sup> With Stirling such evidence appears minimal. There is a tampered photograph of the Queen's opening of the residential building Stirling designed for Queen's College, Oxford, in which Stirling inserted palm trees into the background of the photograph, making what Reyner Banham recognized as a 'palm-collaged anti-Imperialist satire'. See R. Banham, review essay, *JSAH*, vol. 36 (1977), p. 262. There is also a humorous drawing of the Victoria Monument in Liverpool, showing how it was placed atop a public convenience. In the Smithsons' work there is one example of a suggestive use of the anthropology of colonialism to support a critique of state housing in Britain. See M. Crinson, 'From the Rain Forest to the Streets', in Avermaete *et al*, *Colonial Modern*, pp. 98–111.

## Official

Beyond these surprisingly tentative connections in Britain between the avantgarde and empire, there was a more formative relation between empire and the version of Modernism that became mainstream in postwar Britain.

An anecdote provides an entry point. The architect James Gowan (1923–), best-known for his partnership with James Stirling between 1956 and 1963, has recounted his experiences working for Stevenage New Town in the early 1950s. Stevenage was built in Hertfordshire, north of London, to re-house people displaced by bombing and slum clearance. On Gowan's first day there he was picked up at the office by the Chief Architect, Clifford Holliday (1897–1960), driven around the town, and at the end asked for his opinion. Gowan was frank: the roads rambled ineffectually, there was no town centre to speak of, it was all too dull. The Chief Architect brooded but said little or nothing in reply.<sup>42</sup>

The story as Gowan has retold it over the years makes much of the contrast between a hopelessly arid architect-official, the unimaginative tool of state policy, and a young and idealistic neophyte who knew better what a post-war new town should be like. What was forgotten, by Gowan but also by the culture at large, were the previous achievements of Stevenage's Chief Architect. Holliday was a significant and very talented architect who had worked in Britain's Mediterranean empire between the wars. In 1922 he succeeded C. R. Ashbee as city architect and town planning adviser to the British Mandate Government in Palestine, staying there until 1935. His private practice in Jerusalem produced a number of solemnly romantic buildings, wishful testimony to Britain's historical sympathies with the area. Before Stevenage he also worked in Colombo and Gibraltar. Not knowing of Holliday's extraordinary career is symptomatic of a kind of willed forgetting at the time, and either a lack of interest or a separation into discrete expertises in architectural and cultural history since. The British empire is simply not seen as a useful reference point in accounts of postwar modernism and the avantgarde, or even of the British welfare state.<sup>43</sup> Architectural development is described as if it

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<sup>42</sup> James Gowan, interview with the author, 9 February 2010.

<sup>43</sup> See, for instance, N. Timmins, *The Five Giants: A Biography of the Welfare State* (London, 1995); and more specifically, P. Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain, 1945–1975* (Oxford, 1981).

occurred separately from the imperial world. Historians choose between the two rather than understanding how they were sometimes casually, sometimes tensely interrelated.

Holliday had not been appointed to Stevenage without good reason. The garden city vision had achieved a kind of alliance with Zionism's anti-urbanism in Mandate Palestine.<sup>44</sup> And set the task of bringing about this synthesis of preserved old town, planned community, and agricultural hinterland was a succession of British planners, which Holliday joined when he worked on plans for Haifa, Lod, and Jerusalem.<sup>45</sup> With Holliday, then, the garden city returned, perhaps with a Levantine tinge but more certainly with the experience of rolling it out to demand,<sup>46</sup> the type tested for both its regional adaptability and its universalism.

A large part of the unglamorous but important work of campaigning for, then designing and planning, Britain's post-war rebuilding was done by a generation of men and women who had either grown up in the colonies or who had worked substantially within them. They were suited by disposition as much to the command necessary to determine large expanses of the built environment, as to stalking the state's corridors of power or running large architectural offices. Take the Johnson-Marshall brothers. Percy (1915–93) worked as Senior Planner with the London County Council for ten vital years from 1949 to 1959, while his brother Stirrat (1912–81) was the leading architectural light in the innovative and widely influential Hertfordshire Schools programme, and then chief architect to the Ministry of Education. Both were born in Ajmer, where their father worked for the Government of India's Salt Department and later was posted to Derasner (soon to achieve fame as the place where Gandhi led his protest against the salt tax). Attending the same school as the Johnson-Marshalls at Ootacamund was Basil Spence

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<sup>44</sup> E. Tal, 'The Garden City Idea as Adopted by the Zionist Establishment', in Jeannine Fiedler (ed.), *Social Utopias of the Twenties* (Wuppertal, 1995), pp. 64–71.

<sup>45</sup> See R. Home, *Of Planting and Planning: The making of British colonial cities* (London, 1997), pp. 151–7; G. Herbert and S. Sosnovsky, *Bauhaus on the Carmel and the Crossroads of Empire: Architecture and Planning in Haifa during the British Mandate* (Jerusalem, 1993); H. Yacobi, 'Urban Iconoclasm: The Case of the "Mixed City" of Lod', in H. Yacobi (ed.), *Constructing a Sense of Place: Architecture and the Zionist Discourse* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 165–91.

<sup>46</sup> By 1937, thirty-five such town-planning schemes were in existence, with another fifteen town-planning areas declared: Government of Palestine, *Town Planning Adviser. Annual Report for 1937* (Jerusalem, 1937). For Holliday on Stevenage, see C. Holliday, 'The New Towns No. 6 - Stevenage', *Journal of the Town Planning Institute*, vol. 36 (1950), pp. 180–2.



(1907–76), who was born in Bombay and whose father worked for the Royal Mint.<sup>47</sup> In a career notable for many prestigious projects, Spence was to design the high-rise Hutchesontown estate in the Gorbals area of Glasgow. William Holford (1907–75), who was largely responsible for drafting the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947, and was the architect responsible for Paternoster Square beside St Paul’s cathedral, was born and brought up in South Africa. South African-born also was Jaqueline Tyrwhitt (1905–83), who became Director of Studies at the influential School of Planning and Research for Regional Development. Patrick Abercrombie (1879–1957), the author of the County of London Plan (1943) and the Greater London Plan (1944), as well as several other important postwar plans for rebuilding British cities, was equally at home redesigning Dublin, Hong Kong, Addis Ababa, or—in partnership with Holliday—Haifa. Colin Buchanan (1907–2001), the Ministry of Town and Country Planning’s chief overseer of planning enquiries into slum clearance, and then the author of the famous 1963 report *Traffic in Towns*, was born in Simla, India, and had worked before the war for the Public Works Department in Sudan.

These examples point to a phenomenon at least the equal of the much-discussed influx of continental modernists to Britain in the 1930s, yet one almost completely ignored both then and since. (It is also mirrored by the colonial backgrounds of many pioneer figures in the welfare state like R. H. Tawney and William Beveridge.) There was no simple transmission of imperial values here: Holliday’s watered-down garden city aesthetics could have been produced by architect-planners without any colonial experience; likewise, there is no sign of Palestine in Stevenage. Instead, the examples point to a framework of action formed by ‘the indelibility of empire as a structure of consciousness’.<sup>48</sup> Such a consciousness is manifested in the assumption of a big stage of operations, a colonial frame of reference, a global sphere of activities, however much all this was modified by the experience of war, say, or of a Liverpool-style training in the architect as public servant. Garden Cities might appear nearly anywhere—in Cairo or Bombay, as much as Hertfordshire; and British architect-planners might likewise—in the Sudan or Ceylon, as much as Southampton.

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<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, Ootacamund was noted in the 1920s as a hill town that appealed to ‘those who fly from the taxes, rents, servants and labour troubles of England’. J. Chartres Moloney, *A Book of South India* (1926), as cited in E. Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford, 2004), p. 245.

<sup>48</sup> D. Sherman, *French Primitivism and the Ends of Empire, 1945–75* (Chicago, 2011), p. 151.

Many of these post-war architect-planners had thus grown up in colonial settings, in the confident if rootless environments of the Raj, and attended private schools that imbued them with a sense of 'chivalric idealism ... a confidence to command, coupled with the obligation to serve'.<sup>49</sup> Some had worked in the colonies in situations that gave them great scope and where the ethic of public service meant that assuming the authority to direct large numbers of people, resources, or tracts of land was taken for granted. One should not over-generalise here: some with similar backgrounds became ardent anti-imperialists (George Orwell being a paramount example) and there are interesting examples of some architect-planners attempting to foil extortionate acts of imperialism.<sup>50</sup> Broadly, furthermore, the combination of the imperial myth of natural authority and the fashionable 1930s leftism of many within this caste meant they believed not that they worked in the service of colonial oppression and exploitation but for the collective good within what they hoped was a benevolent, modernised state; the social democratic language, one might argue, enhanced the justification for intervention on a large scale, while the administrative techniques shared with and often developed and tested in the colonies were put to use in the mother country. 'To resolve the problems of architecture for millions',<sup>51</sup> was how Percy Johnson-Marshall described his task, fusing colonialist paternalism and a Gropius-like view of social housing. This might be seen as redemptive, but it was also assumed as an almost natural right that would be carried forward by control of technical expertise both in the welfare state and beyond it in the post-imperial world. And thus Johnson-Marshall, a self-avowed Communist, drew his lineage: 'Our father, as an Imperial government official, embodied something of [the Empire's] essence, and he endeavoured to pass on the good and bad traditions of what was to him a total dedication to the British Empire. By one or two lucky accidents the more positive aspects of this dedication were ... metamorphosed into a lifelong task of creating a better human environment.'<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> A. Saint, *Towards a Social Architecture: The Role of School Building in Post-War England* (New Haven and London, 1987), p. 241.

<sup>50</sup> Holliday and Abercrombie unsuccessfully opposed attempts by the Iraqi Petroleum Company to take over large tracts of land in Palestine. See Home, *Of Planting*, p. 157.

<sup>51</sup> 'Notes for Autobiography', Percy Johnson-Marshall Collection, Edinburgh University Library, Crate 244 FR47.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, Crate 278 FR59.

The everyday lifeworld of imperial centres can thus be understood as invested or ‘colonized by capitalism’.<sup>53</sup> And the term ‘colonized’ is not used loosely here: it means an extension of the forms of imperialism itself into the metropole as the state reordered its own compact with its electorate and remade its responsibilities for urban planning and housing in the postwar world: the ‘practices of colonialism outlived their history’ in the colonies themselves and took on adapted forms in the metropole.<sup>54</sup> So, rather than the surface effects of self-congratulation and forgetting as empire was discarded in these years, what can be perceived instead is ‘a continuation of colonialism in a re-ordering of the world whereby the processes of imperialism have taken on new configurations at a local and global level’,<sup>55</sup> or even that ‘the colonies are in some sense “replaced”, and the effort that once went into maintaining and disciplining a colonial people and situation becomes instead concentrated on a particular “level” of metropolitan existence.’<sup>56</sup> In France this took the familiar form of an urban geography reiterating relations in the colonial periphery, the ‘ethnicization of inner cities into impoverished and “racialized” zones’.<sup>57</sup> In Britain immigrant workers tended to work in other sectors of the welfare state than the construction industry and the zoning took on forms that were, at least initially, based on class but with new powers and scope distributed among local and state authorities that echo the colonial experience of many of its architectural and planning bureaucrats.

## Tropical

The development of a climate-responsive approach to the tropics became associated with the welfare and development policies of the colonial state, though it was certainly not limited to this political context or even to the colonial world.<sup>58</sup> What became known as ‘tropical architecture’ was produced by allying research into building science with the abstract language of Modernism. The subject of this alliance constituted a third factor - the topographic and climatic conditions of the region, long the focus of colonial

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<sup>53</sup> H. Lefebvre, ‘Towards a Leftist Cultural Politics: Remarks Occasioned by the Centenary of Marx’s Death’, in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana and Chicago, 1988), p. 80.

<sup>54</sup> K. Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonisation and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> B. Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory* (London, 2002), p. 117.

<sup>56</sup> Ross, *Fast Cars*, p. 77.

<sup>57</sup> Lefebvre, ‘Towards’, p. 118.

<sup>58</sup> The Hungarian-born Olgyay brothers, for instance, were working on tropical architecture in the United States. See Victor and Aladar Olgyay, *Design With Climate: Bioclimatic Approach to Architectural Regionalism* (Princeton, 1963). The first conferences on tropical architecture were organized in Paris (1932) and Mexico (1938), both significantly earlier than the first such conference in Britain (1953).

administrators, engineers and medical experts in their concern with health and hygiene in the tropics. Yet essential to the mythology of tropical architecture was that it was both unprecedented in its ability to harness modern technologies to climatic needs *and* that it was integral to a newly enlightened policy of development—marked by the Colonial Welfare and Development Act (1940)—by which the colonies would be reformed and re-built, given a place within modernity as a prelude to independence.<sup>59</sup> ‘Welfare’ and ‘development’ were promoted as ways of dealing with the threat of world war, trade deficit and internal revolt, and among the primary means of doing this were town planning, new educational and public buildings, and techno-scientific research.<sup>60</sup> A golden thread of expertise would be spun between the colonial metropole and its satellites, and spread via the Building Research Station at Watford, the Colonial Housing Bureau and a web of new institutions such as the journal *Colonial Building Notes* (1950-8, re-named *Overseas Building Notes*, 1958-84), the Tropical Department at the Architectural Association (which launched its first course in 1954), as well as British, French, Israeli, and American building research stations around the world (FIG. 5).<sup>61</sup> The raw material of colonial students would help disseminate this expertise following the example of certain, mainly British, architectural firms.

Modernist architecture was the vehicle of this discourse about tropicity as well as its most salient manifestation; indeed, it became inconceivable that tropical architecture could be anything other than Modernist. It fitted with Modernism’s recent adoption of regionalism as a way of adapting its universalist credo to the specific character of certain areas. Climate and geography became both the master tropes and the quantifiable datum; all other phenomena such as culture and history were at best secondary. But while Britain, Brazil, Finland, even California, all had their recognizably regionalist variants of Modernism, vast swathes of the mostly colonial world only had one regionalism, and that was tropical architecture.

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<sup>59</sup> On the roots of tropical architecture in pre-modernist architectures see I. Jackson, ‘Tropical Architecture and the West Indies: from military advances and tropical medicine, to Robert Gardner-Medwin and the networks of tropical modernism’, *Journal of Architecture*, vol. 18:2 (2013), pp. 167–95; J.-H. Chang and A. D. King, ‘Towards a Genealogy of Tropical Architecture: Historical fragments of power-knowledge, built environment and climate in the British colonial territories’, *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, vol. 32 (2011), pp. 283–300.

<sup>60</sup> Jiat-Hwee Chang points out that this would become part of the broader international phenomenon of development policies. J.-H. Chang, ‘Building a Colonial Technoscientific Network: tropical architecture, building science and the politics of decolonization’, in Lu, *Third World Modernism*, p. 216.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 211–35. See also H. Le Roux, ‘The Networks of Tropical Architecture’, *Journal of Architecture*, vol. 8:3 (2003), pp. 337–54.

Tropical architecture attempted the reconciliation of modernity to a depoliticized version of the conditions of underdevelopment. It was not just that new schools, hospitals, universities, housing, government buildings, and commercial structures became marked by this architectural language, it was also that the style became the image of this transitional phase as the late colonial empire was re-set into the forms of national independence. *Brise-soleil*, smooth white concrete surfaces, adjustable louvres, wide eaves, uncluttered interiors, flat roofs, balconies, interior courtyards, cast concrete and metal screens (mostly with abstract ornament but sometimes generically evocative of honeycombs, local flora and fauna, even tribal stools) all became signature elements, recognizable whether located in the West Indies or Singapore, Nigeria or Aden.<sup>62</sup> Architectural drawings were inscribed with solar path movements, airflow arrows, thermal comfort charts, and meteorological data concerning rainfall. The point about tropical architecture was that its rationality was based, explicitly, on the super-ordinate significance of climate and, implicitly, on the super-ordinate rightness of Modernism in dealing with climate. Local cultural factors, traditional methods, alternative aesthetics, all were at best secondary considerations. Yet, a way of living was being defined by tropical architecture: it created a relation between inside and outside that encouraged the view outwards while concealing the viewer within; it normalised a set of ways of training the body related to culturally-specific ideas of health, hygiene, and leisure; and it emphasized both isolation and spatial expansiveness as desirable conditions, translating the European Modernist values of *Licht, Luft und Öffnung* (light, air, and openness) to the tropics.

Particularly important to the establishment of tropical architecture in the late British empire was an architect who was neither British nor had much direct experience under colonial authorities. Otto Koenigsberger (1908–99) had worked in Modernist circles in Germany before escaping fascism in 1933 to become an archaeologist in Egypt.<sup>63</sup> He

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<sup>62</sup> A different way of adapting modernism to the tropics might also be aligned with a different political relationship to these parts of the world, as in for instance Arie Sharon's articulation of the whole mass of the building rather than the epidermal aspects of it favoured by Fry and Drew. See I. Ben-Asher Gitler, 'Campus Architecture as Nation Building: Israeli architect Arie Sharon's Obafemi Awolowo University Campus, Ife-Ife, Nigeria', in Lu, *Third World Modernism*, pp. 123–4.

<sup>63</sup> The most thorough study of Koenigsberger's early and mid-career can be found in Rachel Lee, 'Negotiating Modernities: Otto Koenigsberger's Works and Networks in Exile (1933–1951)', PhD dissertation (Technische Universität Berlin, 2014). I am grateful to Rachel Lee for letting me see her thesis before it was formally examined. See also R. Windsor Liscombe, 'In-dependence: Otto Koenigsberger and modernist urban settlement in India', *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 21 (2006), pp. 157–78.

moved to India where he worked for the princely Mysore State (1939–48),<sup>64</sup> and then as Federal Director of Housing for the Ministry of Health in the post-colonial Indian government. Much of his practice in India was concerned with new town planning and the provision of mass housing for resettled populations, (FIG. 6) although he left the country under a cloud when he resigned in 1951 following the failure of his design for pre-fabricated housing. On moving to Britain he worked at the London School of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, and in 1954 helped found the Department of Tropical Architecture at the Architectural Association, becoming its director from 1957 until it closed in 1971. Koenigsberger's version of tropical architecture was premised on passive design techniques to manage environmental adaptation even where energy sources were abundant.

While Koenigsberger was the pedagogic force, the architectural practice most closely identified with tropical architecture was that of Maxwell Fry (1899–1987) and Jane Drew (1911–96).<sup>65</sup> This was in part because of their book *Tropical Architecture in the Humid Zone* (1956),<sup>66</sup> one of the earliest and most accessible texts on the subject, but it was also because of the sheer ubiquity of their architecture as it was built (and publicised) first as a product of new colonial policies of welfare and development, and then as post-colonial internationalism across the world from West Africa, to the Persian Gulf, to India. Fry and Drew stated their purpose early in the book:

Modern architecture is distinguished by nothing so much as its determination not to turn aside from science and the effects of science, but to enter into them and wring from them a solution to humanity. Modern architecture, and its extension into town planning, has above all this task of interpreting applied science in humanistic terms. Of making industrialism fit for human use; building cities that ennoble life instead of degrading and destroying it; and of creating everywhere, out of the disparate and anti-social manifestations of machine production and centralized power, unities of resolved thought and feeling, in the form of buildings,

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<sup>64</sup> There is some evidence that the Princely states were a more likely patron of Modernism in India than the organs of direct colonial administration. The work of Cecil James Parker, State Architect in Jaipur from 1936 to 1940, might also be mentioned in this regard.

<sup>65</sup> I. Jackson and J. Holland, *The Architecture of Edwin Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew: Twentieth century architecture, pioneer modernism and the tropics* (Aldershot, 2014).

<sup>66</sup> The importance of their previous book *Village Housing in the Tropics* (1947) has recently been emphasized. Ibid., pp. 159–60.

groups of buildings and larger aggregations, in which life may know its bounds and flourish.<sup>67</sup>

The central theme is how the relation between applied science and industrialism would be mediated by Modern architecture. The ghosts of both the Victorian city (the negative effects of industry) and Communism ('centralised power') hover behind these words. 'Humanistic' stands not just for what Modernist architecture would be but also for the kind of welfare and development politics necessary for the work of 'resolved thought and feeling'. The statement is not intended to be culturally specific but to render a universalist aspiration and, implicitly, to bypass the problems of colonialism. And yet the experiences and ideological conflicts of recent British history cannot help but emerge from within it.

As discussed further by Iain Jackson and Ola Uduku in this volume (pp. xx-xx), the peculiar results of this approach are exemplified by the National Museum in Accra, Ghana (Fry, Drew, Drake & Lasdun, 1955-57). The design of this building claimed to raise climatic considerations to a new pitch of precision (**FIG. 7**). Measures to allow tropical breezes to penetrate at all levels included raising the building and directing openings particularly towards the main south-westerly breezes; corrosion from humidity was counteracted by sealing the dome with aluminium; tropical storm gulleys were provided while openings to the north-east were given protection from the storms likely to come from that direction; and, finally, the overhanging eaves protected the building below from the intense midday sun while diffusing light inside. Yet, for all these measures, in terms of contemporary culture, the museum was utterly alien to Ghana. Rarely visited by Ghanaians and its collections inadequately looked after by its curators, the building imported a European idea of what a museum was for, marked the making of a nation along the lines of the colonial entity, and announced all this with a building form previously unknown in Accra, the dome.<sup>68</sup> Much the same could be said of many of the products of tropical architecture in Africa, not so much conceived for African use as for a western accommodation to the climate and an ethnocentric conception of the cultural life that would follow.

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<sup>67</sup> M. Fry and J. Drew, *Tropical Architecture in the Humid Zone* (London, 1956), p. 20.

<sup>68</sup> M. Crinson, 'Nation-Building, Collecting, and the Politics of Display: The National Museum, Ghana', *Journal of the History of Collecting* (November 2001), pp. 231–50.

This architecture made a virtue of its apparent simplicity and the assertive qualities of its abstract volumes and penetrable interiors. These would tame the ambient conditions of the hot climate, re-making them as part of a new image of tropical modernity.<sup>69</sup> The architecture also worked by contrast: this was rationality, welfare, and (the promise of) democracy incarnate, by comparison with both pre-colonial buildings and the tropes of colonial architecture. It maintained this illusion even when those other architectures were equally as good or perhaps even better at responding to climate. In all this it also provided a notably attractive image for its clients when photographed, broken up by deep shadows and bright sun, its power bound up with the promise of a new dispensation made by the institutions it housed. The seemingly irrefutable benevolence of this architecture was equally bestowed on the offices, philanthropic gestures, and headquarters buildings of various corporations: British Petroleum (**FIG. 8**), the African Manganese Corporation, or the United Africa Company (owned by Unilever). Fry and Drew were the masters of these new opportunities, equally at home with colonial officials and nationalist leaders, with government departments and large corporations, with the Modernist establishment as much as with the young Turks of the avantgarde.<sup>70</sup>

## Vernacular

The idea of the vernacular had a privileged place in Modernist discourse, often called into being as modernity's accompaniment in a dynamic if largely one-sided relationship. Sometimes this veered close to the idea of the 'primitive' in Modernist art.<sup>71</sup> But the vernacular was also fundamentally different, perhaps because of its etymological roots in the Latin for household slaves (hence home-bound or domestic), and its role in a linguistic distinction. With the latter, Modernism shared something with classicism: for both, the vernacular complemented architects' work because it stood for those low, local or popular languages (or styles) distinct from the high or universal languages of Latin (or even Esperanto). Like the famous contrast between a bicycle shed and Lincoln

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<sup>69</sup> In the absence of extensive contemporary research into the actual climate effectiveness of these buildings we only have Fry and Drew's claims and a body of fragmentary and anecdotal evidence. Of the latter see, for instance, the following on their Chandigarh housing: 'We were told [by the occupants] that the houses had not been designed for local conditions, and this was confirmed to us in many other ways. It was indeed a sad commentary on architecture that the beautiful variety of concrete grilles designed by the architects, had been covered up by the occupants with paper, cardboard and reeded matting to cut out the bright sunlight and also as a crude solution to the frequent dust storms in the area during the summer months!'. Quoted in Z. Deen Khwajam *Memoirs of an Architect* (Lahore, 1999), p. 46.

<sup>70</sup> For the ease with which they straddled colonial and post-colonial regimes in their work for Chandigarh and for oil towns in Iran, see Jackson and Holland, *The Architecture*, pp. 215–67.

<sup>71</sup> On the 'primitive' and architectural discourse, see A. Forty, 'Primitive', in J. Odgers, F. Samuel, and A. Sharr (eds.), *Primitive: Original Matters in Architecture* (London, 2006), pp. 3–14.



Cathedral, both were necessary but only one was deemed to possess an intellectual and spiritual side to it. With Modernism, the vernacular also stood for stability, the ad hoc and locality, as against Modernism's own association with change, universalism, and internationalism.<sup>72</sup>

All this was inflected in importantly different directions in the immediate contexts of the empire. In the escape of the colonial Modern from history, the vernacular had many attractions but also great problems. If in Europe the vernacular was always something nearby, belonging to some part of one's own culture, however ordinary, then in the colonial world the vernacular indubitably belonged to the peoples who had been colonised. If the vernacular usually indicated pre-industrial building traditions in Europe or buildings that existed regardless of the work of architects, then in the colonies the vernacular could only be associated with forms of life that colonialism had exploited, placed at risk, bypassed, or only encouraged as alternatives to indigenous forms of anti-colonial modernity. The colonial vernacular, in short, indicated the dispossessed or made marginal, and it indicated these in more immediately political ways than the use of the term in the west did. This is why discourses about the vernacular in colonial settings are as much about power as they are about forms of resistance or critiques of power.

Not least among the vernacular's attractions was that it offered pre- or non-colonial models that might support architectural versions of a post-colonial future. A typical example of this genre is an article by Andrew Boyd, sometime tea expert and architect, writing in *Marg* in 1947 on 'peasant tradition in Ceylon'. For Boyd 'common people's building ... suggests a solution to one side of the problem of refounding Ceylon architecture'.<sup>73</sup> This vernacular, suggested Boyd, was alive as opposed to other traditions (presumably historicist colonial architecture) which had stopped. Although its continued existence was indifferent to colonialism, the vernacular pointed to 'the spirit in which the new materials and potentialities which modern civilization has necessarily introduced *could* (given the social opportunity) be used to develop an architecture that would be both

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<sup>72</sup> For examples of Modernism's close embrace of the vernacular, see the essays in M. Umbach and B. Hüppauf (eds.), *Vernacular Modernism: Heimat, Globalization, and the Built Environment* (Stanford, 2005); and the special issue 'The Primitive in Modern Architecture and Urbanism', *Journal of Architecture*, vol. 13:4 (2008).

<sup>73</sup> A. Boyd, 'A People's Tradition', *Marg*, vol. 1:2 (1947), p. 31. A sign of the generically significant status of Boyd's article is that it had originally appeared in *Architectural Review*.

genuinely modern and genuinely of the country'.<sup>74</sup> This was a common Modernist argument: it made affiliations with a low form of building, claimed it as unchanging and as 'genuinely' of the country, as opposed to a vaguely indicated colonial architecture, urging the need to develop and find something 'genuinely' modern which would have affinities with this vernacular (but which turned out to be the forms of Modernism developed in 1920s Europe). Boyd's photographs showed roofs of two pitches, verandahs, carved rafters, lacquered balusters, plans of simple one or two storey cottages, and walls of mud or painted plaster. The simplicity of these buildings was praised, while neglect and dilapidation was regretted. Boyd positioned himself as the defender of the proper use of the land (for which read ancient and agricultural) as against the colonial government and the tea and rubber industry. The result was the immigration of labourers from South India who were housed in 'rows of company-owned, iron-roofed "coolly lines",' grimly indicative of the 'lowered status of the wage labourer under full colonial conditions'.<sup>75</sup> Contemporary architecture was equally as negligent of local tradition as it was of 'serious and consistent ideas, whether structural or aesthetic or social'. The result: 'straight "classic" through a variety of "harmonious blends of east and west" to the peculiar jazzy zigzags of the go-ahead jerry-builder'.<sup>76</sup>

Typical also was Boyd's judgment that the vernacular could neither be carried on nor revived. Instead, principles must be extracted and used imaginatively, resulting in a natural affinity between modern and vernacular.<sup>77</sup> These principles included a close relation between form and function, a utilitarian basis, and a differentiating of the component parts of the structure. These provide the foundation for the claim that 'in the renewal of architecture nothing less than a renewal of the entire national and cultural life is involved'.<sup>78</sup> As if to clinch the argument, Boyd appended to his article two of his own semi-detached houses (**FIG. 9**). With two-slope roofs, balconies and terraces, rendered in white with grey woodwork and red front doors, the houses are oriented to avoid the sun and benefit from the wind. Built in 1940 in Colombo's suburbs, they each have three

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 31–2.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>77</sup> A good example of this affinity-finding is Percy Johnson-Marshall's statement at the first conference on tropical architecture in Britain: 'It is interesting, incidentally, to see that several of the characteristic forms of modern European architecture, ie the piloti, the cantilevered balcony, the brise-soleil etc have been used for centuries in the Tropics'. See A. M. Foyle (ed.), *Conference on Tropical Architecture, 1953* (London, 1954), p. 23, as quoted in H. Le Roux, 'Building on the Boundary—Modern Architecture in the Tropics', *Social Identities*, vol. 10:4 (2004), p. 445.

<sup>78</sup> Boyd, 'A People's Tradition', p. 32.

bedrooms, large gardens and servants' quarters, serving social needs far from those of their supposed vernacular sources. If there is any affinity here it seems at best a vaguely formal one, a pseudo-isomorphism.

As this indicates, Modernists tried to separate the vernacular from what they deemed inappropriate uses by existing colonial culture, particularly the copying of surface appearances or the appropriation of part of a building for symbolic reasons.<sup>79</sup> A graphic example of the latter is provided by Minnette de Silva's experience when working on a building for the Red Cross Society in Kandy. A committee made up of colonial dignitaries asked the architect to provide a roof of a 'Kandyan type' to a design they had already accepted. As she argued in response:

It is not feasible to change the roof of a building of this type, without altering the design of the building. In any event, if, with the instructions given to me last year, for the designing of the HQ building, I had been asked to imitate Kandyan architecture, I would have protested and advised very strongly against the idea, from the point of view of economy, utility (the maintenance costs would be ever recurring) and the standpoint of architectural aesthetics. As an architect, I do not believe in, and so cannot subscribe to copying the architecture of an era which is long past. As an architect, I believe in building to suit our living needs in a living way, utilising the most suitable modern and progressive means at our disposal, and only adopting those sound fundamental principles of building of the past, which are as authentic today as before. It is from this starting point that a beautiful and satisfying modern architecture can result. The era of the Kandyan style of roof is dead. It was achieved in a feudal era with feudal means.<sup>80</sup>

Although still young, de Silva was standing on her professional pride and writing as an ambitious, internationally well-connected Modernist.<sup>81</sup> She separated out three attitudes: the colonial view that historical forms can be recreated regardless of any continuing tradition; the Modernist view that a progressive culture must be in contact with changing

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<sup>79</sup> For a discussion of the relation of vernacular discourse to modernist mores, see S. Richards, "Vernacular" accommodations: wordplay in contemporary-traditional architecture theory', *Architectural Research Quarterly*, vol. 16:1 (2012), pp. 37-48.

<sup>80</sup> Minnette de Silva to Siegfried Giedion 3 January 1950, GTA Archives (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, Zurich), 42-SG-34-13/15.

<sup>81</sup> She included the letter in her correspondence with Siegfried Giedion as an example of the parochial attitudes of local colonial authorities.

technology; and, only indicated here, the Modernist view of the vernacular as something worth paying attention to when it is ‘authentic’, that is, a continuing tradition that practices ‘sound fundamental principles of building’—the vernacular as neither history nor representation. Interestingly, de Silva believed Modernism was more likely to thrive in non-western areas where craft traditions still thrived, as opposed to the west, where industrialization had destroyed them.<sup>82</sup>

As these and countless similar examples indicate, an interest in local vernacular architecture is a feature of late colonial cultures, both from a Modernist view and from a colonial interest in encouraging certain versions of national identity (and sometimes both combined). But a distorted, even more instrumentalized version of the vernacular also played a part in the management of crisis caused by anti-colonial insurgency. Such was the case with the so-called ‘emergencies’ in Kenya (from 1952 to 1958) and British Malaya (from 1948 to 1960), in which policies of villagization were employed by the colonial powers (**FIG. 10**). In Malaya the new settlements were part of the Briggs Plan (1950) and involved relocation of rural populations. The policy was continued by the new High Commissioner General Templer in 1951 even as he turned from the military and coercive policy of his predecessor and towards a new ‘hearts and minds’ approach to the emergency.<sup>83</sup> In high architecture the results of this approach were buildings that evoked a vernacular model—the so-called ‘Malay house’—as a means of showing understanding or identifying the new force of political succession in Malaya. Architectural journals, scholarly publications, and local history societies, all showed great interest in the Malay house at this same moment.<sup>84</sup> In ‘low’ architecture Templer re-named the forced rural re-housing as ‘new villages’, although they remained resettlement camps aimed at isolating the mostly Chinese rural population from the virus of Communism, or in the case of Kenya of isolating the Kikuyu from Mau Mau influence.<sup>85</sup>

The policy of ‘villagisation’ in response to revolt in Kenya and Malaya was infused with the sense that it was in ordinary rural buildings that crisis could be dealt with, that only

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<sup>82</sup> ‘I am trying to get the craftsmen into building work again as they used to be in a former day. But not only to continue the traditional stuff but to get them to use their skill to enrich a Modern Ceylon Architecture’: Minnette de Silva to Siegfried Giedion (3 January 1950).

<sup>83</sup> Policy in Kenya was directly influenced by Malaya in terms of villagisation, but not evidently so in terms of other architectures. C. Elkins, *Britain’s Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London, 2005), p. 235.

<sup>84</sup> M. Crinson, *Modern Architecture and the End of Empire* (Aldershot, 2003), p. 163.

<sup>85</sup> There were over 500 new villages in Malaya, and over 800 in Kenya, with many hundreds of thousands of people forcibly removed from their homes and resettled in what in most cases were ‘detention camps in all but name’. Elkins, *Britain’s Gulag*, p. 237.

something equivalent to the enclosure movement in eighteenth-century Britain could reform the land and do away with violent opposition.<sup>86</sup> The new villages, as their name conceals, were actually a brutal intervention into the domestic and the locally particular and an enforcement of new patterns of settlement.<sup>87</sup> The terms used for what was replaced are particularly significant: in Malaya the Chinese were ‘squatters’, while in Kenya the Kikuyu merely lived in ‘scattered huts’.<sup>88</sup> A collective organic order would replace these, and thus the colonial state avoided accepting either squatting or isolated huts as forms of vernacular, in marked difference with the exactly contemporary work of the North African modernist avantgarde and the French colonial state. Villagisation combined extreme modernity – barbed wire, lookout towers, rigid grid layouts – and a pared down and hollowed out version of the vernacular. In Kenya some officials imagined villagisation, inspired by images of organic communities, as the creation of ‘a harmonious society of prosperous villages and sturdy yeoman farmers immune to the appeals of political radicalism’.<sup>89</sup>

The architectural culture’s response to all this was tentative. Villagisation was only referred to obliquely or in isolated articles: in *Colonial Building Notes* for instance, the problem of housing during the Mau Mau uprising is only understood as part of the problem of urban growth in Kenya ‘irrespective of emergencies or thuggery’; while the same journal discussed ‘squatter’ housing and new town development in Malaya but kept its distance from the new villages.<sup>90</sup> The mainstream architectural periodicals ignored them entirely, though there was some interest in the architectural schools.<sup>91</sup> But in those

<sup>86</sup> M. P. K. Sorrenson, *Land Reform in the Kikuyu Country: A Study in Government Policy* (Nairobi, 1967), p. 222.

<sup>87</sup> In Kenya villagisation removed populations from small scattered villages, concentrating them in large settlements behind barbed wire. H. Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau: The British Army and Counter-Insurgency in the Kenya Emergency* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 25, 222–5. On comparisons between the policies in Malaya and Kenya see Elkins, *Britain’s Gulag*, pp. 103–6. On Malaya see also G. Clancy, ‘Toward a Spatial History of Emergency: Notes from Singapore’, in R. Bishop, J. Phillips, and W.-W. Yeo (eds.), *Beyond Description: Singapore, Space, Historicity* (London, 2004), pp. 30–59.

<sup>88</sup> In his commissioned report, J. C. Carothers declared that Kikuyu suffered from a mass psychosis due to their liminal condition between traditional and modern worlds. Disloyal Kikuyu, Carothers claimed, ‘have no chance to alter their allegiance in isolated country houses’. Villagisation was the answer to this ‘and to many other psychological problems in Kikuyu-land’. See J. C. Carothers, *The Psychology of Mau Mau* (Nairobi, 1951), p. 22. Villagisation was not just a measure for Emergency conditions, but a policy ‘for the whole future of Kikuyu rural life’. Carothers also advised that a home hygiene programme be implemented to teach domesticity to Kikuyu women.

<sup>89</sup> B. Berman, ‘Bureaucracy and Incumbent Violence: Colonial Administration and the Origins of the “Mau Mau” Emergency’, in B. Berman and J. Lonsdale (eds.), *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa* (London, 1992), p. 254.

<sup>90</sup> ‘African Housing in Kenya’, *Colonial Building Notes*, 25 (1954), p. 3; ‘Town Planning in Malaya’, *Colonial Building Notes*, 30 (1955), pp. 8–10; ‘Housing in Malaya’, *Colonial Building Notes*, 35 (1956), p. 4.

<sup>91</sup> Hamzah-Sendut, ‘Planning Resettlement Villages in Malaya’, *Planning Outlook*, 1 (December 1966), pp. 58–70.

rare instances when these events seeped into architectural discourse they took the form of the vernacular. Here is Terry Ward writing on ‘Kenya Landscape’ in 1960: ‘It has become common knowledge that whilst we in Europe over the past few centuries have become preoccupied to a large extent with the technical aspects of architecture, the natives of tropical Africa have been content with either their wattle and mud huts or their caves or tents’.<sup>92</sup> The Mau Mau anti-colonial revolt had put land and community (and thus architecture) in crisis, and so the Kikuyu had been resettled in new villages for ‘protection against terrorism’, better communications, and the control of populations. ‘A complete change of environment was strictly avoided by the planners’, Ward reported, ‘instead, the simplicity of the early homesteads was retained ... The solution answered some of the more immediate problems relative to the emergency and contributed to the overall progress of the native. The African shanty town complex, which one generally associated with large-scale native migrations, has been avoided’.<sup>93</sup> The self-perceived benevolence of late colonialism takes mythical form here, and that includes the separation of ‘high’ architecture from the activities of policing and coercion. If this sounds like a situation far removed from the concerns of Modernism, then that would be to accept its own mythmaking.

Contemporary with the new villages was the modernist architecture of Richard Hughes (1926–), one of the most interesting if neglected architects of this colonial moment and a relative radical in Kenya for his advocacy of racially-mixed new towns.<sup>94</sup> Hughes often built in Kikuyu areas, sometimes inspired by Le Corbusier’s postwar Brutalism, sometimes attempting other forms of a vernacular-inspired Modernism. His churches, for instance, have been described as ‘fortress-like constructions with walls of natural stone which show a heavy, mechanically massive character’,<sup>95</sup> and their qualities have

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<sup>92</sup> T. Ward, ‘Kenya Landscape’, 244 *The Journal of the University of Manchester Architectural and Planning Society* (Spring 1960), p. 16.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>94</sup> As a student at the Architectural Association Hughes produced a thesis setting out ‘an environment for multi-racial living’ in the form of a development plan for the ideal town of Maragua: Richard Hughes, Fifth Year Thesis (1953), Architectural Association Archives. When he returned to Kenya Hughes became active in the Capricorn African Society, an attempt to stave off both white suprematism and black nationalism and to affect the transition from white rule in East Africa to power sharing via a multi-racial electorate of the educated. Although Hughes found it hard to yoke architecture to this agenda in his professional work—apart from getting commissions because of his reputation as a liberal-minded architect—he did make several interventions in Kenya’s architectural culture along these lines, most notably in a 1958 address to the East Africa Institute of Architects: Richard Hughes, interview with the author, 20 August 2014.

<sup>95</sup> U. Kultermann, *New Architecture in Africa* (London, 1963), p. 24.

even been claimed to ‘express the aspirations of the Kikuyu’.<sup>96</sup> One might perhaps think of them as forms of atonement or gestures of reconciliation; certainly the appropriation of Le Corbusier’s Ronchamp chapel points in this direction (**FIG. 11**). Furthermore, the renewed activity of church building in Kikuyu areas was a measure of support for Christian Kikuyu who had been most likely to oppose the Mau Mau.<sup>97</sup> The churches’ massive character was taken through to the u-shaped stone piers that articulate the facades Hughes designed for the Kenya Federation of Labour Headquarters (1963) in Nairobi, though here again rugged endurance seemed appropriate to the political base of the nationalist leader, Tom Mboya, Hughes’s client.<sup>98</sup> If these buildings summon up the vernacular more as a material quality than a building tradition, in the African Girls’ High School Chapel (1957) in Kikuyu, Hughes chose a different approach with thin stone walls set at a zigzag and a large pitched roof supported by struts on stone piers (**FIG. 12**). The struts and the roof rafters were made from telegraph poles, a pragmatic but evocative response to the small budget. It was, as Hughes argued, a way of exemplifying how the ordinary products of modernity might be adapted to different cultural uses.<sup>99</sup>

Also contemporary to the new villages were buildings in Nairobi by Amyas Connell (1900–80), one of the pioneers of Modernism in Britain, who came to Kenya in 1941. These included new Legislative Buildings (1952, re-named Parliament Buildings in 1963), the Crown Law Offices (1955) (**FIG. 13**), and the Aga Khan Hospital (1956), all indicative of the state’s need to identify with high Modernism. The last of these was distinguished by its dynamically cantilevered lecture theatres and raking ramps,<sup>100</sup> while the first two were refined versions of tropical architecture with decorative screens using motifs from Indian and Timurid sources.<sup>101</sup> Notably turning away from any local vernacular, Connell preferred associations with more historically and geographically distant sources; whether this was by association with previous empires (Moorish Spain, Moghul India), or to conjure a generic exoticness, is unclear. At the very same moment of villagisation, nearby architecture was seeking either regionally symbolic or climatically

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>97</sup> On Christain Kikuyu as anti-Mau Mau, see McCulloch, *Colonial Psychiatry*, p. 71.

<sup>98</sup> R. Hughes, ‘East Africa’, *Architectural Review* (July 1960), p. 29.

<sup>99</sup> ‘Church Buildings in Kenya’, *Church Buildings Today*, 5 (January 1962), pp. 4–13.

<sup>100</sup> *Architect & Building News*, 215 (18 February 1959), pp. 219–26. On Connell’s African career, see D. Sharp, ‘The Modern Movement in East Africa’, *Habitat International*, vol. 7:5/6 (1983), pp. 311–26.

<sup>101</sup> Hughes, by contrast, developed varied and often ad hoc means of dealing with the climate. He had consulted with Koenigsberger during work on his AA thesis but this was still before the formulation of tropical architecture and Hughes never accepted it *in toto*. Richard Hughes, interview with the author, 20 August 2014.

regional responses to Kenya. These responses do not relate in a one to one way. They are part of a strategically bifurcated set of attitudes and strategies towards architecture and the production of space, one that can still function even at moments of crisis in cultural legitimacy. Huge numbers of Kikuyu were effectively having their society redefined by the coercive architectural intervention of villagisation, while in the city flamboyant, structurally and ornamentally expressive forms of Modernism were declaring the benefits of welfare and development.<sup>102</sup>

Another Modernist reaction to place, inherent to the abstraction of its most purified versions, was to set the building in nature as if it was utterly at one with it in a way that transcended any literal vernacular. While Frank Lloyd Wright's or Mies van der Rohe's work embodied the most distilled versions of this, the stratagem was never without ideological undertow. This form of 'representation without history' acquires particular resonance in colonial modernity.<sup>103</sup> Nature imitated without reference to history—nature as picturesque adjunct of the floating volume—does not escape the problem of ownership without acknowledgement of the claims of others. In 1956 Richard Hughes bought a secluded plot to build his own house just outside Nairobi. The land ran steeply down to a stream and faced the Karura forest on the opposite slope. A solid concrete wall incorporating large boulders anchored the house to the hillside, enabling a set of living spaces at treetop level with balconies and large windows looking over the secluded scene, giving a sensation of floating above the valley. From inside, the forest seems to fill the house's openings, its timeless otherness complementing the ideal life (family, art, work) within (**FIG. 14**). The vernacular is internalized and bypassed as the house appropriates or naturalises nature for itself, carrying with it the illusion of non-ownership.<sup>104</sup> Unimpaired by extrinsic matters, alienation and displacement are made to serve as aesthetic experience.

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<sup>102</sup> In the architectural culture the nearest we come to some overt linking together of high and low architectures is to be found in a 'Letter from Nairobi' by Ian Marshall, published in *Architect & Building News* in 1959. Here the 'revolution' in Kikuyu lands is presented as an opportunity for architects and planners. As well as the breaking up of traditional patterns of land holding, villagisation offers the prospect of expansion into 'embryo' towns and full scale new towns. I. Marshall, 'Letter from Nairobi', *Architect & Building News*, 215 (18 February 1959), pp. 210–1. Marshall worked as an assistant in Hughes's office at this time and perhaps his comments point towards the potential of the ideas in Hughes's student thesis.

<sup>103</sup> On 'representation without history' see Levine, *Modern Architecture*, pp. 204–10.

<sup>104</sup> 'Kenya has no building tradition', Hughes wrote. See 'Church Buildings' pp. 4–13. The irony of considering Hughes's house not as Edenic re-creation but as an 'isolated hutment' is obvious. The larger point is that it was not so much that there was no vernacular (how could that ever be the case?) as that there was an improper vernacular, one as unacceptable to the colonial authorities as it was to the modernist architect.



## After Empire

The formal end of colonial power did not mean an immediate end to work for British architects in what had been the empire; indeed, their extraordinary assurance continued to propel them well after the end of empire. Modernism itself, in its many guises, bridged the transition with ease, carried forward also by an emerging generation of post-colonial Modernists trained with western architects or in western architectural schools: Oluwole Olumuyiwa in Nigeria, Lim Chong Keat in Malaysia, William Lim in Singapore, Balkrishna Doshi in India, and so on. New reputations might be made depending on the ability to accommodate the complexities of this transitional moment.

The later career of Robert Matthew, described as ‘*the* representative architectural career in postwar Britain’,<sup>105</sup> is exemplary of several aspects of this moment, and connects back to those paternalist architect-planners created by empire. Matthew was the quintessential ‘tarmac professor’, constantly flying out to consultancies and conferences in far-flung locations. In the 1960s all this amounted, according to his biographer Miles Glendinning, to a ‘commonwealth of design’, even a ‘global vision’ in which Matthew ‘[embraced] the dynamic of decolonisation with increasing enthusiasm’.<sup>106</sup> For an architect whose professional career was formed in the crucible of the postwar welfare state, and amid architectural institutions geared to a vision of reconstruction along ameliorative social-democratic lines, shifting from these to international development seemed an inevitable move. Matthew’s consultative and leadership roles (he was President of the International Union of Architects [IUA] from 1961 to 1965 and was the major player in forming the Commonwealth Association of Architects [CAA] in 1963) were used by him to try to harmonize what it meant to be an architect in modern societies, including standards of professionalism, forms of architectural training, and the regularization of competitions and housing standards. Matthew was also able to update attitudes to post-colonial architecture with utopianist ideas from Buckminster Fuller and Constantinos Doxiadis, making them seem part of a vision of architecture that was above politics or passing regimes. His networking led to important projects for his firm RMJM (Robert Matthew, Johnson Marshall & Partners, formed in 1956) across the world. The firm’s involvement in planning Pakistan’s new capital city, Islamabad, or its work as executive architects for

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<sup>105</sup> A. Saint, ‘Foreword’ in M. Glendinning, *Modern Architect: The Life and Times of Robert Matthew* (London, 2008), p. vii.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 356, 498.

the large programme of new secondary schools in Nigeria, or on neo-vernacular housing schemes in post-revolutionary Libya, are all examples of the opportunities that came Matthew's way.<sup>107</sup> One view of this is that Matthew was screened from any suggestion of neo-colonialism by the internationalist gloss he had acquired through the IUA's contacts with the UN and UNESCO.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, Matthew himself had taken on an active role as a supporter of decolonisation in architectural culture through the CAA, for whom decolonization largely meant the devolution of institutional responsibility and the use of technical aid and indigenisation schemes to bridge the withering away of colonial authority. The CAA, like other Commonwealth organizations at this time, was seen by many as sufficiently benevolent in its attempts to improve the built environment across the old empire as not to be tainted by colonialism, though this did not mean British architects relinquished their 'special responsibility'.<sup>109</sup>

Matthew is only one of many examples of this garnering of major projects by architects from the now-old imperial centre. The substantial legacy of the policy of welfare and development into the postcolonial era might be found in the continuing overseas work of architects like Fry and Drew, Cubitt, or Kenneth Scott, or new work for architects like Max Lock in Nigeria, as well as in public projects that spanned the two eras.<sup>110</sup> The University of Dar Es Salaam in Tanzania was one of these. Based on a master plan by Norman & Dawbarn, the university was sited on a hill overlooking the city, where the buildings were laid out according to the movements of the sun and prevailing winds. Like the Kumasi University of Science and Technology, whose layout it was inspired by, the University of Dar Es Salaam presented the very image of benevolent modernity by contrast with the realities of urban and rural life (see also Bremner and Nelson chapter in this volume, pp. xx-xx).

A career formed by its ability to bridge decolonization was that of John R. Harris. After war service (including imprisonment in Hong Kong) and training at the AA, Harris and his wife Jill Rowe won the competition for the Doha State Hospital in 1953, only two years out from completing their training. Winning the competition despite the practice's

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., pp. 479, 483.

<sup>108</sup> This form of screening as well as other kinds of neocolonialism were quite explicitly discussed in Matthews's circles. Ibid., pp. 364, 381.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., pp. 377–83.

<sup>110</sup> It has been estimated that 'By the 1960s, there were 30 practices in Nigeria and Ghana largely staffed from Britain'. See Le Roux, 'Building on the Boundary', p. 441.

inexperience was remarkable; Harris had specialized in the design of farm buildings and had cast around in a variety of projects before landing Doha.<sup>111</sup> To give some context, the hospital competition was far less prestigious but far larger than the better-known contemporary competition for Coventry Cathedral, and funded by the first flush of oil revenues coming to the State of Qatar. The Doha commission was thus Harris's way out of the problems of private practice in austerity Britain. The hospital hugs the desert landscape in a double cruciform plan, its cross-ventilated wards lit by reflected sunlight and its windows set deeply behind concrete canopies (**FIG. 15**).<sup>112</sup> Although less well known than, say, work by Fry and Drew, and for a part of the world with a less publicised relation to British colonial history (treaties in 1916 and 1934 had established Qatar as a British protectorate), the Doha commission established Harris as an international expert on hospital and health care design, as well as an architect of reputation in the Arabian Gulf.<sup>113</sup> It was this positioning, one initiated quite by chance, that gave Harris his architectural authority to practice, from this point on, across far-flung colonial and non-colonial sites: in Oman, Libya, Brunei, Kuwait, Dubai, Iran, Malaysia, Pakistan, Hong Kong and Nigeria, and not just in healthcare design but for banks, exhibition centres, hotels, and sports facilities too. With offices established by the end of the 1950s in Tehran, Dubai, and Kuwait, his firm was the trusted instrument of local regimes producing oil-funded architecture writ large, including the newly-nationalised National Iranian Oil Company.<sup>114</sup> Harris's career, even more than Matthew's, is a prototype for today's global practices of Norman Foster, Richard Rogers, and Nicholas Grimshaw.

While the continuity of work for British architects is remarkable, so too were the profound cultural changes that independence brought, marked in the architectural field by the turning of new postcolonial states towards architects untainted by British colonial

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<sup>111</sup> This included an entry for the Nairobi Town Hall competition in 1950. The competition might reward further research for the way its entrants so well represented the status quo of white architects in private practice across the empire at this moment: among the prizewinners were architects based in Durban, London, Nairobi, Khartoum, Cape Town, and Sydney. See *Architects' Journal*, 113 (18 January 1951), p. 70. The winning design, by Levick, Connell and Croft of Durban, added extensions to the existing Greek temple-fronted building, including a clock tower, a banqueting hall and an assembly room. The latter two were separated by a system of terraces and linked to the main building with a colonnade of slim columns. *Architects' Journal*, 113 (1 March 1951), pp. 270–1. There was much talk of adaptation to the tropical conditions but this finished building was never to be described as tropical architecture, probably because it was too classical in its composition.

<sup>112</sup> *Architects' Journal*, 118 (17 September 1953), pp. 341–51.

<sup>113</sup> See A. E. J. Morris, *John R. Harris Architects* (Westerham, 1984).

<sup>114</sup> Harris was proud to have been one of the first Britons allowed back into Abadan after the nationalization of its oil refinery. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

associations. The most obvious examples of this are Le Corbusier's work for the new capital of the Punjab at Chandigarh (1952–9) and Louis Kahn's National Assembly at Dhaka, Bangladesh (1962–74). In both, however, there is something ambivalent, perhaps even apologetic about modernity, whether it is the evocation of ruins in the punctured screen walls of Kahn's work or the summoning up of pre-industrial images in Le Corbusier's. But this shifting away from colonial architects happened at various levels, not all of which were marked by high state symbolism and globally-renowned architects. Seeking economic links with Africa, West Germany developed expertise in the version of tropical architecture developed by Koenigsberger at the Architectural Association.<sup>115</sup> Architects from Israel and Eastern Europe were particularly favoured: the first because its government sought diplomatic and economic influence in Africa and in exchange offered western expertise without western alignment or neo-colonialism; the second because Soviet Block countries offered a 'Second World' perspective, and one experienced in reconstruction. The Greek architect Doxiadis forged one of the most successful of these postcolonial practices, particularly skilled in its generalized references to the vernacular.<sup>116</sup> Unencumbered with any connection to the colonial past and espousing a universalist philosophy of architecture more flexible than CIAM's, Doxiadis presided over a global consultancy spanning West Africa, South America, the Middle East, South East Asia and the Indian subcontinent.

The relationship between empire and Modernism did not produce a unified body of practices. In a sense, how could it across such a diversity of geographies, cultures, and historical experience? Turned against history and representation, Modernism could be directed to the purposes of anti-colonial internationalism as much as to those of technocratic developmentalism. The semiotic looseness resulting from its practices of 'reduction and negation' entailed many oscillations of meaning: from returns to the pre-colonial past to utopias of the post-colonial future; from a pacifying image of

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<sup>115</sup> A. Folkers, *Modern Architecture in Africa* (Amsterdam, 2010), pp. 174–6.

<sup>116</sup> See the special issue 'Cold War Transfer: architecture and planning from socialist countries in the "Third World"', *Journal of Architecture*, vol. 17:3 (2012). For Israeli architects, see N. Feniger and R. Kallus, 'Building a "New Middle East": Israeli architects in Iran in the 1970s', *Journal of Architecture*, vol. 18:3 (2013), pp. 381–401; A. Levin, 'Exporting Architectural National Expertise: Arie Sharon's Ife University Campus in West-Nigeria (1962–76)', in R. Quek, D. Deane, and S. Butler (eds.), *Nationalism and Architecture* (Aldershot, 2012), pp. 53–66; Gitler, 'Campus Architecture', pp. 112–40. On Doxiadis, see V. d'Auria and B. De Meulder, 'Unsettling Landscapes: The Volta River Project, New Settlements Between Tradition and Translation', *OASE*, 82 (October 2010), pp. 115–38.

Commonwealth to a tool for the continuation of paternalism; from an epistemic shift to a return of order.

Modernism was both a product of the fragmentation of social life and an expression of it. As Jameson explains, 'it programs us to it and helps to make us increasingly at home in what would otherwise... be a distressingly alienating reality'.<sup>117</sup> Thus, it is part of 'a final and extremely specialized phase of that immense process of superstructural transformation whereby the inhabitants of older social formations are culturally and psychologically retrained for life in the market system'.<sup>118</sup> In the density of the medium of architecture, it is the ambiguity of this retraining that is at stake with Modernism in the empire. Among the consequences of Modernism's diversity under imperialism is the recasting or even estranging of assumptions or associations made with Modernism elsewhere. The case of the avantgarde in Britain reveals its inability to comprehend empire as a fit subject for architectural critique. The everyday experience of empire in British architectural culture, as well as the imperial perspective of architect-planners in Britain, demonstrates the irrelevance of national boundaries in writing an architectural history of these phenomena. Similarly with tropical architecture. The claimed ubiquity of this approach was part of that claimed even-handed, ideology-free technocratic approach upon which many careers relied in the transition from empire to independence. The relation of Modernism to vernacular traditions in the empire also points inevitably to Modernism's conflicted role in relation to modernity. To hail the vernacular was sometimes to help fix and normalize a relation to precisely those things that empire had helped marginalise. But sometimes Modernism, too, could seize on that marginality as a sign of difference with colonial culture. Such was the semantic slipperiness of the vernacular, it could be conjured up when colonial power needed to reassure itself that its power was benign, but equally it could merge with Modernism when the latter claimed its own powers of direct communion with nature and its materials. Finally, if, according to many accounts, Modernism received its obsequies in the west sometime around 1968, then in the old lands of empire it never met such a fated endgame. History and representation were, in a sense, always there, whether in the last days of empire or in emergent national and ethnic cultures, and always to be negated. Modernism remained the instrument of new claims of influence, of internationalism, of globalisation.

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<sup>117</sup> Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 236.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

